



---

## Alaska National Parks News Release

### Roundtable on National Parks & Alaska's Economy (Sponsored by Senator Lisa Murkowski)

April 3, 2012

University of Alaska Anchorage

#### Prepared Remarks by Sue Masica, Regional Director NPS-Alaska

Senator Murkowski, I appreciate this opportunity to address economic issues relevant to Alaska's national parks. Let me start with some information about the Service and its economic role in the life of Alaska.

Not long after the passage of the Alaska Lands Act, one of my predecessors referred to Alaska's national parks as her true Permanent Fund. Those words are as true today as three decades ago. National parks represent the nation's permanent protection of vast landscapes. In Alaska, these units support recreation and subsistence, and hold not only evidence of thousands of years of cultural history, but a deep well of natural resources: the headwaters of major rivers, spawning grounds for millions of salmon, the migratory ranges for large caribou herds – to name just three.

These areas were not established by Congress as economic engines, but over time they have served Alaskans well in that capacity. There is a dollar value in the presence of national parks, and here are some numbers that add perspective:

The National Park Service in Alaska had a \$114.4 million budget for FY-11.

- More than half -- \$66 million – was paid in salaries and benefits.
- At the peak of our summer season, we employ more than 1,000 people in 24 communities in Alaska, many hired from local towns and villages.
- Significant amounts stay in our home towns as we pay rent, buy groceries, and support local charities. *(Last year, NPS employee contributions made up the largest dollar increase to the Combined Federal Campaign – more than any other Federal agency in Alaska.)*

The other \$48 million we spend is more variable in its destination. These expenses cover items such as construction, rent, telecommunications, aircraft rentals, utilities, and all the other things it takes to support visitor centers, offices, and operations spread from Sitka to Kotzebue.

Directly and indirectly, much of that funding supports park visitors – more than 2.2 million people in 2011. Thanks to work by the Alaska Travel Industry Association and an improving economy, that number is expected to rise this year.

Most visitors also connect to their parks using one or more of our business partners. On average, between 400 and 425 companies work in Alaska park units every year.

About 100 of these are concession contracts which are generally competitively bid. The other 300-325 are simple commercial use authorizations, usually awarded non-competitively. Most of my colleagues at the table represent one of these two categories.

Gross revenue for the 100 concession contracts is about \$100 million per year. The largest contracts are for the Glacier Bay National Park cruise ships and the Denali transportation contract.

Another key business partner, and one who works with every land manager in Alaska, is Alaska Geographic. This non-profit cooperating association has employees in 48 locations and annually provides some \$3 million in support of education and visitor information to Alaskans and visitors.

A national economic model helps the Service further quantify the benefit of this activity. While it does not perfectly reflect Alaska spending patterns, it gives a sense of proportion. This Money Generation Model calculated national park visitor spending in Alaska at nearly \$208 million per year, supporting about 3,700 private and government jobs.

Recent work commissioned by the National Parks Conservation Association focused on Katmai, and using a different model, estimated that park's benefit at about \$37 million versus \$13 million in our model.

One last area adds to the picture of the park-related economy. One of our small NPS programs helps communities take advantage of the technical expertise which resides inside the Park Service.

The Rivers Trails and Conservation Assistance program has had several success stories. In Anchorage, it helped mountain biking enthusiasts plan and build new sustainable trails within the Municipality's Hillside park network. While those trails are not a direct jobs creator, they boost the quality of life for residents and help support bike-related businesses that in turn make sales to residents and visitors.

The second example is one of Secretary Salazar's America's Great Outdoors projects. The Kachemak Bay Water Trail was an idea born in Homer when Dave Brann put ideas to paper and approached RTCA for advice. A local steering committee is now exploring the idea of a well-documented boating route from Homer to the head of the bay to Seldovia – one that might attract

kayakers and boaters from around the world to enjoy and better understand the adventure that is, as the group notes, “waiting at the end of the road”.

Our experience in community recreation planning is to help Kachemak Bay residents move forward, and make informed decisions that will benefit the community, the landowners, and local government.

Again, Senator Murkowski, thank you for the opportunity to bring this information to light. I’m happy to address any questions from you or the panelists.